

VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST CONTROL OF THE PATHET LAO
(Testimony of Former Pathet Lao Officers)

The whole history of the Pathet Lao movement which is summarized in the attached paper reveals the fact that the Pathet Lao are firmly under the control of the Vietnamese Communists.

The handful of Laotian rebels who founded the Pathet Lao did so on Vietnamese soil under Vietnamese Communist direction. They spent several years in Vietnam, undergoing training and indoctrination. Their return to Laos in 1953 was possible only as a front for the Vietnam Communist troops from whom they have received all their supplies of arms and equipment. Their failure to arouse any significant support from the Laotian people has left them completely dependent upon the Vietnamese.

Prince Souphanouvong's frequent absences on trips to Hanoi indicate clearly that he is under the necessity of getting instructions from the Vietnamese Communists on all important matters. In August 1956, for instance, while the RLG waited impatiently for the Pathet Lao delegates to arrive so that the mixed commissions could start their work, and while Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma postponed his trip to France in hopes of getting the sessions started before his departure, Souphanouvong was in Hanoi, conferring with his Vietnamese Communist superiors.

Hanoi propaganda has repeatedly emphasized the fact that the Pathet Lao are an integral part of the Vietnam Communist organization and Pathet Lao actions and statements have consistently paralleled Chinese and Vietnamese Communist propaganda lines. For example, Pathet Lao approaches to the RLG for the reopening of negotiations followed immediately upon Peiping and Hanoi broadcasts urging this course and suggesting the lines along which such approaches might be made--lines which forecast exactly the Pathet Lao proposals.

It is thus possible, from analysis of the history of the Pathet Lao movement, to discern clearly the control exercised over it by the Vietnamese Communists. There is also available more direct and categorical evidence. Some members of the Pathet Lao became disillusioned, both with the Communist nature of the movement and with the role played in it by the Vietnamese and have returned to their allegiance to the RLG. One such defection was reported in press dispatches from

Bangkok in October 1955. Captain Kavinh Keonakhone, a former battalion commander in the Pathet Lao army was appointed as a secretary to the Pathet Lao delegation to the talks in Vientiane and took the opportunity which this offered to surrender to the RLG. He was able to tell a press conference a great deal about the direct control exercised by the Vietnamese Communists over the Pathet Lao.

Prince Souphanouvong, the nominal head of the Pathet Lao, said Captain Kavinh, actually was unable to make any important decisions without the approval of his Vietnamese advisers. His government was under the immediate control of a Vietnamese group permanently established near the Pathet Lao capital. This group was, in turn, in radio contact with a special Vietnamese staff for Laos which was located just across the border in North Vietnam.

Similar liaison arrangements controlled Pathet Lao military units with Vietnamese operated radios maintaining communications with Vietnam military authorities. Prince Souphanouvong and his government were frequently kept in ignorance of the messages transmitted between the Vietnamese authorities and the Pathet Lao units, thus being deprived of effective control of what were allegedly their own military forces. Vietnamese Communist advisers were in every government office and in effective command of all Pathet Lao military units, although, to lessen the resentment of Pathet Lao soldiers, this command role was kept secret.

Captain Kavinh's statements were confirmed by those of another defector, Captain Boun Leua, formerly a principal logistics officer under the Pathet Lao general staff, who came over to the RLG in November, 1955. He was able to describe the resentment of Pathet Lao soldiers at being commanded by Vietnamese and the severe punishments inflicted upon them even including, in some cases, deportation to Vietnam.

Captain Boun Leua's work as a supply officer was supervised by a Vietnamese, whose approval was required for all decisions. The Pathet Lao military command was under the control of a Vietnamese General, assisted by more than 150 Vietnamese advisers. Besides these there were about ten Vietnamese Communist advisers with each battalion. There were also numerous Vietnamese advisers in the political departments of the Pathet Lao government--almost fifty in the Ministry of Education alone.

The Vietnamese control was so firmly established that the Pathet Lao leaders could not rebel against it even if they wished to. The heads of the Pathet Lao government, according to Captain Kavinh, lived in constant fear of commando action against them by Communist Vietnamese troops. The slightest reluctance by Pathet Lao forces to "cooperate" completely with the Vietnamese Communists brought down severe punishment. Colonel Singkapo, for instance, one of the principal Pathet Lao military leaders, was promptly sent to China for "reeducation" when the Vietnamese suspected his loyalty.

Both Captain Kavinh and Captain Boun Leua agree that many young Pathet Lao are held in Vietnam where they undergo training and also serve as hostages. Among them are children and wives of some of the chief Pathet Lao leaders. Sons of Prince Souphanouvong, Phoumi Vongvichit and Tiao Souk were being held in Russia, according to a telegram from Moscow which was seen by Captain Kavinh.

It can scarcely be doubted, with such evidence from former members of the Pathet Lao, that the Pathet Lao movement is firmly under the control of the Vietnamese Communists and that the Laotian leaders are in fact unable to make any decisions for themselves but must accept at all times the orders of the Vietnamese "advisers".